

622
3

A

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
OF
DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON.

By THOMAS TYERS, Esq.

" Much may be right, yet much be wanting." PRIOR.

" **W**HEN Charles the Second was informed of the death of Cowley, he pronounced, " that he had not left a better man behind him in England." It may be affirmed with truth, that this was the case when Dr. Johnson breathed his last. Those who observed his declining state of health during the last winter, and heard his complaints of painful days and sleepless nights, for which he took

large quantities of opium, had no reason to expect that he could survive another season of frost and snow. His constitution was totally broken, and no art of the physician or surgeon could protract his existence beyond the 13th of December. At the request of Mr. Cruikshank, the executors permitted his body to be opened, on the suggestion that his internals might be uncommonly affected,

B

which

which was the case on inspection. The dead may sometimes give instruction to the living. The Cyrus of Xenophon ordered his breathless body to fertilize the earth that had given it nourishment. Johnson's inside had not the soundness of that of old Parr (as related by Harvey), not far from whom he is now deposited. One of his kidneys was found to be decayed. He never complained of disorder in that region (which was mortal to his friend Mr. Garrick); and probably it was not the immediate cause of his dissolution. Perhaps "of no disease he died," like the character from the Tragedian; for who can tell wherein vitality consists? Johnson could hear, perhaps, with ambitious satisfaction, that he was to be buried in Westminster Abbey; for the love of fame is the last infirmity of noble minds; and, to continue quotation in the words of Dr. Young,

"Nor ends with life, but nods on
fable plumes,

"Adorns our hearse, and flatters on
our tombs."

Possibly the thought or talk of the incisions of anatomy would have disturbed his imagination. But, in this case, what was not prohibited was permitted. For it may be easily asked, in the words of the soldier to the Ephesian Matron, in Petronius,

"Id cinerem aut manes credis curare
sepultos?"

It might be thought that so strong and muscular a body might have lasted many years longer; for Johnson drank nothing but water, and lemonade (by way of indulgence) for many years, almost uninterruptedly, without the taste of any fermented liquor; and he was often abstinent from animal food, and

kept down feverish symptoms by dietetic management. Of Addison and Pope he used to observe, perhaps to remind himself, that they ate and drank too much, and thus shortened their days. It was thought by many who dined at the same table, that he had too great an appetite. This might now and then be the case, but not till he had subdued his enemy by famine. But his bulk seemed sometimes to require to be repaired by kitchen physic. To great old age not one in a thousand arrives. How few were the years of Johnson in comparison of those of Jenkins and Parr? But perhaps Johnson had more of life by his intenseness of living. Jenkins, as it is expressed on his memorial in Bolton church (in which parish he lived, and died, at the antediluvian age of one hundred and sixty-nine) was happy, if not in the variety, yet in the duration of his enjoyments, which were probably of fishing and of drinking. His diet was coarse and sober, says Cheyne. Johnson's time is to be dated from the number of his ideas. He was old in mind, though not comparatively in years. Most people die of disease. He was all his life preparing himself for death; but particularly in the last stage of his asthma and dropsy. "Take care of your soul—don't live such a life as I have done—don't let your business or dissipation make you neglect your sabbath"—were now his constant inculcations. Private and public prayer, when his visitors were his audience, were his constant exercises. He cannot be said to be weary of the weight of existence, for he declared, that to prolong it only for one year; but not for the comfortless sensations he had lately felt, he would suffer the amputation of a limb. He was

willing

willin
possib
expect
much
his lat
doned
or du
foul t
instant
king o
be kno
cannot
chefa
this h
when
peace
thing
submi
good c
On or
surgeo
punctu
him th
"he f
did no
man o
up his
throug
more
probab
more t
was in
and p
years.
tune a
penfat
which
pilgrim
sedet a
"For v
"Sits g
Of the
bestow
ty-nine
scroph
was to
by go
of gol
But ev

willing to endure positive pain for possible pleasure. But he had no expectation that nature could last much longer; and therefore, for his last week, he undoubtedly abandoned every hope of his recovery or duration, and committed his soul to God. Whether he felt the instant stroke of death, and met the king of terrors face to face, cannot be known; for "death and the sun cannot be looked upon," says Rochefaucault. But the writer of this has reason to imagine that when he thought he had made his peace with his Maker, he had nothing to fear. He has talked of submitting to a violent death, in a good cause, without apprehensions. On one of the last visits from his surgeon, who, on performing the puncture on his legs, had assured him that he was better, he declared, "he felt himself not so, and that he did not desire to be treated like a woman or a child, for that he had made up his mind." He had travelled through the vale of this world for more than seventy-five years. It probably was a wilderness to him for more than half his time. But he was in possession of rest and comfort and plenty, for the last twenty years. Yet the blessings of fortune and reputation could not compensate to him the want of health, which pursued him through his pilgrimage on earth. *Post equitem sedet atra cura.*

"For when we mount the flying steed,
Sits gloomy Care behind."

Of the hundred sublunary things bestowed on mortals, health is ninety-nine. He was born with a scrophulous habit, for which he was touched, as he acknowledged, by good queen Anne, whose piece of gold he carefully preserved. But even a Stuart could not expel

that enemy to his frame, by a touch. For it would have been even beyond the stroaking power of Great-rin in all his glory, to charm it away. Though he seemed to be as athletic as Milo himself, and in his younger days performed several feats of activity, he was to the last a convulsionary. He has often slept aside, to let nature do what she would with him. His gestures, which were a degree of St. Vitus's dance, in the street, attracted the notice of many; the stare of the vulgar, but the compassion of the better sort. This writer has often looked another way, as the companions of Peter the Great were used to do, while he was under the short paroxysm. He was perpetually taking aperient medicines. He could only keep his ailments from gaining ground. He thought he was worse for the agitation of active exercise. He was afraid of his disorder's seizing his head, and took all possible care that his understanding should not be deranged. *Orandum est, ut sit mens sana in corpore sano.* When his knowledge from books, and he knew all that books could tell him, is considered; when his compositions in verse and prose are enumerated to the reader, (and a complete list of them, wherever dispersed, is desirable) it must appear extraordinary he could abstract himself so much from his feelings, and that he could pursue with ardour the plan he laid down of establishing a great reputation. Accumulating learning (and the example of Barretier, whose life he wrote) shewed him how to arrive at all science. His imagination often appeared to be too mighty for the controul of his reason. In the preface to his Dictionary, he says, that his work was composed "amidst inconvenience and distraction,

in sickness and in sorrow." "I never read this preface," says Mr. Horne, "but it makes meshed tears."

"If this memoir-writer possessed the pen of a Plutarch, and the subject is worthy of that great biographer, he would begin his account from his youth, and continue it to the last period of his life, in the due order of an historian. What he knows and can recollect, he will perform. His father (called "gentleman" in the parish register) he says himself, and it is also within memory, was an old bookseller at Litchfield, and a whig in principle. The father of Socrates was not of higher extraction, nor of a more honourable profession. Our author was born in that city; and the house of his birth was a few months visited by a learned acquaintance, the information of which was grateful to the doctor. It may probably be engraved for some monthly repository. The print and the original dwelling may become as eminent as the mansion of Shakspeare at Stratford; or of Erasmus at Rotterdam. He composed a poetical stanza, at five years old, on his treading on a duck. If it is to be given to the public, it ought to be with authentication. He was Hercules in his cradle. Could Lopez del Vega, or Cowley, or Milton, or even Pope, have asserted more truly, "they lisped in numbers?" It is said of some men, they hardly had a childhood, but arrived to early ripeness, just as the Russian winter turns into summer without passing through the spring. He certainly must have had a good school education. He was entered of Pembroke college, Oxford, Oct. 31, 1728, and continued there for several terms. By whose bounty he was supported, may be known to enquiry. While he was there, he

was negligent of the college rules and hours, and absented himself from some of the lectures, for which when he was reprimanded and interrogated, he replied with great rudeness and contempt of the lecturer. Indeed he displayed an overbearing disposition that would not brook controul, and shewed that, like Cæsar, he was fitter to command than to obey. This dictatorial spirit was the leading feature in his deportment to his contemporaries. His college themes and declamations are still remembered; and his elegant translation of Pope's Messiah into Latin verse found its way into a volume of poems published by one Husbands. In 1735, after having been some time an usher to Anthony Blackwall, his friends assisted him to set up an academy near Litchfield. Here he formed an acquaintance with the late bishop Green, then an usher at Litchfield, and with Mr. Hawkins Browne. As the school probably did not answer his expectation, (for who does not grow tired of teaching others, especially if he wants to teach himself?), he resolved to come up to London, where every thing is to be had for wit and for money (*Rome omnia venalia*), and to seek his fortune. He was accompanied by his pupil Mr. Garrick, and travelled on horseback to the metropolis in March, 1737.

"The time and business of this journey are before the public in some letters from Mr. Walmsley, who recommends Johnson as a writer of tragedy, as a translator from the French language, and as a good scholar. He brought with him his tragedy of Irene, which afterwards took its chance on Drury-lane theatre. Luckily he did not throw it into the fire, by design or otherwise, as Parson Adams did his

Æschylus

Æschylus by mistake. He offered himself for the service of the book-sellers; "for he was born for nothing but to write,"—

"And from the jest obscene reclaim our youth,
And set our passions on the side of truth."

"The hurry of this pen prevents the recollection of his first performances. But he used to call Doddsley his patron, because he made him, if not first, yet best known, by printing and publishing, upon his own judgment, his satire, called "London," which was an imitation of one of Juvenal, whose gravity and severity of expression he possessed. He there and then discovered how able he was "to catch the manners living as they rise." The poem had a great sale, was applauded by the public, and praised by Mr. Pope, who, not being able to discover the author, said, "he will soon be *déterré*." In 1738 he luckily fell into the hands of his other early patron Cave. His speeches for the senate of Lilliput were begun in 1740, and continued for several sessions. They passed for original with many till very lately. But Johnson, who detested all injurious imposition, took a great deal of pains to acknowledge the innocent deception. He gave Smollett notice of their unoriginality, while he was going over his historical ground, and to be upon his guard in quoting from the Lilliput Debates. It is within recollection, that an animated speech he put into the mouth of Pitt, in answer to the parliamentary veteran Horace Walpole, was much talked of, and considered as genuine. Members of parliament acknowledge that they reckon themselves much obliged for the printed accounts of debates of both houses, because they are made to speak better than they do in the senate. Within these

few years, a gentleman in a high employment under government was at breakfast in Gray's inn, where Johnson was present, and was commending the excellent preservation of the speeches of both houses, in the Lilliput Debates. He declared, he knew how to appropriate every speech without a signature; for that every person spoke in character, and was as certainly and as easily known as a speaker in Homer or in Shakspeare. "Very likely, Sir," said Johnson, ashamed of having deceived him, but I wrote them in the garret where I then lived." His predecessor in this oratorical fabrication was Guthrie; his successor in the Magazine was Hawkesworth. It is said, that to prove himself equal to this employment (but there is not leisure for the adjustment of chronology) in the judgment of Cave, he undertook the life of Savage, which he asserted (not incredible of him), and valued himself upon it, that he wrote in six and thirty hours. In one night he also composed, after finishing an evening in Holborn, his *Hermit of Teneriff*. He sat up a whole night to compose the preface to the *Preceptor*.

"His eye-sight was not good; but he never wore spectacles; not on account of such a ridiculous vow, as Swift made not to use them, but because he was assured they would be of no service to him. He once declared, that he "never saw the human face divine." He saw better with one eye than the other, which however was not like that of Camoens, the Portuguese poet, as expressed on his medal. He chose to say to an observer and inquirer after the apparent blemish of his left eye, that "he had not seen out of that little scoundrel for a great many years." "It is inconceivable, he used to observe, how little

light or fight are necessary for the purpose of reading." Latterly, perhaps, he meant to save his eyes, and did not read so much as he otherwise would. He preferred conversation to books; but when driven to the refuge of reading, by being left alone, he then attached himself to that amusement. "Till this year, said he to an intimate, I have done tolerably well without sleep, for I have been able to read like Hercules." But he picked and culled his companions for his midnight hours, "and chose his author as he chose his friend." The mind is as fastidious about its intellectual meal as the appetite is as to its culinary one; and it is observable, that the dish or the book that palls at one time is a banquet at another. By his innumerable quotations you would suppose, with a great personage, that he must have read more books than any man in England, and have been a mere book-worm; but he acknowledged that supposition was a mistake in his favour. He owned he had hardly ever read a book through. The posthumous volumes of Mr. Harris of Salisbury (which treated of subjects that were congenial with his own professional studies) had attractions that engaged him to the end. Churchill used to say, having heard perhaps of his own confession, as a boast, that "if Johnson had only read a few books, he could not be the author of his own works." His opinion, however, was, that he who reads most, has the chance of knowing most; but he declared, that the perpetual talk of reading was as bad as the slavery in the mine, or the labour at the oar. He did not always give his opinion unconditionally of the pieces he had even perused, and was competent to decide upon. He did not

choose to have his sentiments generally known; for there was a great eagerness, especially in those who had not the pole-star of judgment to direct them, to be taught what to think or to say on literary performances. "What does Johnson say of such a book?" was the question of every day. Besides, he did not want to increase the number of his enemies, which his decisions and criticisms had created him; for he was generally willing to retain his friends, to whom, and their works, he bestowed sometimes too much praise, and recommended beyond their worth, or perhaps his own esteem. But affection knows no bounds. Shall this pen find a place in the present page to mention, that a shameless Aristophanes had an intention of taking him off upon the stage, as the Rehearsal does the great Dryden? When it came to the notice of our exasperated man of learning, he conveyed such threats of vengeance and personal punishment to the mimic, that he was glad to proceed no farther. The reverence of the public for his character afterwards, which was increasing every year, would not have suffered him to be the object of theatrical ridicule. Like Fame, in Virgil, *vires acquirit cundo*. In the year 1738 he wrote the Life of Father Paul, and published proposals for a translation of his History of the Council of Trent by subscription; but it did not go on. Mr. Urban even yet hopes to recover some sheets of this translation, that were in a box under St. John's Gate; more certainly once placed there, than Rowley's poems were in the chest in a tower of the church of Bristol.

Night was his time for composition. Indeed he literally turned night into day, *noctes vigilabat ad*

ipsum

ipsum mane, but not like Tigellius in Horace. Perhaps he never was a good sleeper, and (while all the rest of the world was in bed) he chose his lamp, in the words of Milton,

"In midnight hour,
Were seen in some high lonely tower."

"He wrote and lived perhaps at one time only from sheet to sheet, and (according to vulgar expression) from day to day. Dr. Cheyne reprobrates the practice of turning night into day, as pernicious to mind and body. Jortin has something to say on the vigils of a learned man, in his *Life of Erasmus*. As he would not sleep when he could, nothing but opium could procure him repose. There is cause to believe he would not have written unless under the pressure of necessity. *Magister artis in enique largitor venter*, says Perſius. He wrote to live, and luckily for mankind lived a great many years to write. All his pieces are promised for a new edition of his works, under the inspection of sir John Hawkins, one of his executors, who has undertaken to be his biographer. Johnson's high tory principles in church and state were well known. But neither his Prophecy of the Hanover House, lately maliciously reprinted, nor his political principles or conversations, got him into any personal difficulties, nor prevented the offer of a pension, nor his acceptance. *Rara temporum felicitas, ubi sentire quæ velis, et quæ sentias, dicere licet*. The present royal family are winning the hearts of all the friends of the house of Stuart. There is here neither room nor leisure to ascertain the progress of his publications, though, in the idea of Shenstone, it would exhibit the history of his mind and thoughts.

"He was employed by Osborne

to make a catalogue of the Harleian library. Perhaps, like those who stay too long on an errand, he did not make the expedition his employer expected, from whom he might deserve a gentle reprimand. The fact was, when he opened a book he liked, he could not refrain from reading it. The bookseller upbraided him in a gross manner, and, as tradition goes, gave him the lie direct, though our catalogue-maker offered at an excuse. Johnson turned the volume into a weapon, and knocked him down, and told him, "not to be in a hurry to rise, for when he did, he proposed kicking him down stairs." Perhaps the lie direct may be punished *ad modum recipientis*, as the law gives no satisfaction. His account of the collection, and the tracts that are printed in quarto volumes, were well received by the public. Of his folio labours in his *English Dictionary*, a word must be said; but there is not room for much. This writer has sufficient proof that Doddsley suggested the first idea of this great collection. Johnson wanted a long and a large literary employment. The proposal rather took him by surprise. *Vantæ molis erat!* The pecuniary bargain was necessary to him, and the engagement for time and payment was concluded. But the work went on but slowly. The money was all gone (for time and money are the most valuable things in the world) before the task was completed. Illness, weariness, or dissipation, clogged the wheels of this machine. A refreshing fee was perpetually necessary; or, to use classical instead of legal allusion, golden showers were to be thrown into the lap of this literary Danaë, to the amount of three hundred additional pounds. It required the purses of five eminent booksellers to be opened to pay

for the labours of this Hercules. When Johnson came to settle with his employers, said Andrew Millar, they produced their receipts for the money they had advanced, most of which were for small sums. He was confounded to find the balance against himself, for he kept no account, and that he had been working nine years for nothing. The creditor instantly became the debtor. The booksellers generously made him a present of the difference, and paid his reckoning for him. Doddsley wished for an alphabetical list of the books quoted for this dictionary to be prefixed to the work; but he was not gratified. The delineation of his plan, which was esteemed a beautiful one, was inscribed to lord Chesterfield, no doubt with permission, whilst he was secretary of state. It was at this time, he said, he aimed at elegance of writing, and set for his emulation the preface of Chambers to his Cyclopædia. Johnson undoubtedly expected beneficial patronage. It should seem that he was in the acquaintance of his lordship, and that he had dined at his table, by an allusion to him in a letter to his son, printed by Mrs. Stanhope, and which he himself would have been afraid to publish. Whilst he was ineffectually hallooing the Graces in the ear of his son, he set before him the slovenly behaviour of our author at his table, whom he acknowledges as a great genius, but points him out as a rock to avoid, and considers him only as "a respectable Hot-tentor." When the book came out, Johnson took his revenge, by saying of it, "that the instructions to his son inculcated the manners of a dancing-master, and the morals of a prostitute." Within this year or two he observed (for anger is a short-lived passion) that, bating some im-

proprieties, it contained good directions, and was not a bad system of education. But Johnson probably did not think so highly of his own appearance as of his morals; for, on being asked if Mr. Spence had not paid him a visit! "Yes," says he, and he probably may think he visited a bear." "Johnson," says the author of the *Life of Socrates*, is a literary Caliban." "Very likely," replied Johnson, and Cooper (who was as thick as long) is a literary Punchinello."

"It does not appear that Lord Chesterfield shewed any substantial proofs of approbation to our philologist, for that was the professional title he chose. A small present he would have disdained. Johnson was not of a temper to put up with the affront of disappointment. He revenged himself in a letter to his lordship, written with great acrimony, and renouncing all acceptance of favour. It was handed about, and probably will be published, for *littera scripta manet*. He used to say, he was mistaken in his choice of a patron, for he had simply been endeavouring to gild a rotten post. An endeavour has been made to procure a copy of it, in order to afford an abstract to the reader, but without success. Mr. Langton, when applied to, thought he could not grant it without a breach of trust. It is in more hands than one; and, perhaps, where secrecy was not enjoined. Johnson took care to send his letter by a safe hand to lord Chesterfield, who shewed it to Doddsley. His lordship defended himself very plausibly against the misstatements of the writer, and candidly pointed out some beautiful sentences and happy expressions. It was a long letter. (*grandis epistola*) and written with great asperity. It prevented, as

Doddsley

Doddsley reported, the patronage of his lordship, and the benefit from a dedication, which he said would have been the promotion of the sale. One of Johnson's acquaintance, who in conversation probably made lord Chesterfield to be in the wrong, said before him, that his lordship, tho' the politest, was the proudest man alive; "Except one person," said an acquaintance. "That," said Johnson, "I take to myself; but my pride was defensive." But nothing that is here said is meant as an arraignment of lord Chesterfield.

"Lord Chesterfield indeed commends and recommends Mr. Johnson's dictionary in two or three numbers of the World. Not words alone pleased him. "When I had undergone," says the compiler, "a long and fatiguing voyage, and was just getting into port, this lord sent out a small cock-boat to pilot me in." The agreement for this great work was for sixteen hundred pounds. This was a large book-feller's venture at that time: and it is in many shares. Robertson, Gibbon, and a few more, have raised the price of manuscript copies. In the course of fifteen years, two and twenty thousand pounds have been paid to four authors. Johnson's world of wonders demands frequent editions. His titles of Doctor of Laws from Dublin and from Oxford, (both of which came to him unasked and unknown, and only not unmerited) his pension from the king, which is to be considered as a reward for his pioneering services in the English language, and by no means as a bribe, gave him consequence, and made the dictionary and its author more extensively known. It is a royal satisfaction to have made

the life of a learned man more comfortable to him.

"These are imperial works, and worthy kings."

"Lord Corke, who would have been kinder to him than a Stanhope, (if he could) as soon as it came out, presented the dictionary to the Academy della Crusca at Florence in 1755. Even for the abridgement in octavo, which puts it into every body's hands, he was paid to his satisfaction, by the liberality of his bookfellers. His reputation is as great for compiling, digesting, and ascertaining the English language, as if he had invented it. His grammar in the beginning of the work, was the best in our language, in the opinion of Goldsmith. During the printing of his dictionary, the *Ramblers* came out periodically; for he could do more than one thing at a time. He declared that he wrote them by way of relief from his application to his Dictionary, and for the reward. He has told this writer that he had no expectation they would have met with so much success, and been so much read and admired. What was amusement to him, is instruction to others. Goldsmith declared that a system of morals might be drawn from these essays: this idea is taken up and executed by a publication in an alphabetical series of moral maxims. Indeed he seems to be the great lay-preacher of morality to the nation.

"The Rambler is a great task for one person to accomplish, single-handed. For he was assisted only in two essays by Richardson, two by Mrs. Carter, and one by Miss Talbot. His *Idlers* had more hands. The World, The Connoisseur, (the Gray's

Gray's Inn Journal an exception) the Mirror, the Adventurer, the Old Maid, all had help-mates. The toilet, as well as the shelf and table, have these volumes, lately republished with decorations. Shenstone, his fellow collegian, calls his style a learned one. There is, indeed, too much Latin in his English. He seems to have caught the infectious language of sir Thomas Brown, whose works he read, in order to write his life. Though it cannot be said, as Campbell did of his own last work, that there is not a hard word in it, nor words of learned length, in the poetical phrase of the Deserted Village, yet he does not rattle through hard words and stalk through polysyllables, to use an expression of Addison, as in his earlier productions. His style, (the banter and ridicule of Lexiphanes) as he says of Pope, became smoothed by the scythe, and levelled by the roller. It pleased him to be told by Dr. Robertson, that he had read his dictionary twice over. If he had some enemies beyond and even on this side of the Tweed, he had more friends. Only he preferred England to Scotland. It were to be wished, he had not pronounced, in his Hebridian Tour, whatever particular provocation was before him, that "a Scotchman must be a sturdy moralist who does not prefer Scotland to truth." An inadvertent expression in the house of lords, on the imputed cowardice of the Americans, accelerated them into enemies and heroes. If Johnson's accusation had been more confined, a Caledonian, like Wotton's Ambassador, might have been permitted to exaggerate for the honour of his country. But it was taken for a national reflection, never to be forgiven nor forgotten: and it is considered as a breach of the union,

at least between Johnson and Scotland. The dead cannot send a negotiator in their cause. To say the truth, Johnson confessed at last, that the Scotch would never forgive him for publishing that book. But he never wished he had not written it. As it is cowardly to insult a dead lion, it is hoped, that as death extinguishes envy, it also does ill-will: "for British vengeance wars not with the dead."

"The well known short epigram of Cleiveland, against our sister kingdom, is more malignant than all that Johnson has said or written. But that shall have no place here. It may be admitted of Johnson, at least by his enemies, as it was said of South by Tillotson, "that he wrote like a man, but bit like a dog." This may be applicable to the epic poem of Fingal, and to the personality on the translator. It puts the writer in mind of the complaint and expression of sir Isaac Newton, on the controversy of Hare and Bently about Terence, that "it was a shame two such great men should be fighting about a play-book!" The particulars of the dispute here alluded to must be trusted to future biographers. *Non nostrum inter vos tantas componere lites.* But for the injunction of lord Chesterfield, "not to seem to be ignorant, (especially as an historiographer) of any fact," this literary and personal altercation would not have been referred to.

"He gave himself very much to companionable friends for the last years of his life, (for he was delivered from the daily labour of the pen, and he wanted relaxation) and they were eager for the advantage and reputation of his conversation. Therefore he frequently left his own home, (for his household gods were not numerous or splendid enough

enough for the reception of his great acquaintance) and visited them both in town and country. This was particularly the case with Mr. and Mrs. Thrale (*ex uno disce omnes*), who were the most obliging and obliged of all within his intimacy, and to whom he was introduced by his friend Murphy. He lived with them a great part of every year. He formed at Streatham a room for a library; and increased by his recommendation the number of books. Here he was to be found (himself a library) when a friend called upon him; and by him the friend was sure to be introduced to the dinner-table, which Mrs. Thrale knew how to spread with the utmost plenty and elegance; and which was often adorned with such guests, that to dine there was, *epulis accumbere divum*. Of Mrs. Thrale, if mentioned at all, less cannot be said, than that in one of the latest opinions of Johnson, "if she was not the wisest woman in the world, she was undoubtedly one of the wittiest." She took or caused such care to be taken of him, during an illness of continuance, that Goldsmith told her, "he owed his recovery to her attention." She taught him to lay up something of his income every year. Besides a natural vivacity in conversation, she had reading enough, and the gods had made her poetical. The Three Warnings, (the subject she owned not to be original) are highly interesting and serious, and literally come home to every body's breast and bosom. The writer of this would not be sorry if this mention could follow the lady to Milan. At Streatham, where our philologer was also guide, philosopher, and friend, he passed much time. His inclinations here were consulted,

1784.

and his will was a law. With this family he made excursions into Wales and to Brighthelmstone. Change of air and of place were grateful to him, for he loved vicissitude. But he could not long endure the illiteracy and rusticity of the country; for woods and groves, and hill and dale, were not his scenes—

"Tower'd cities please us then,
"And the busy hum of men."

"On hearing that this literary lady (one of the joys of his own life) was likely to be courted into matrimony a second time, Johnson set himself to prevent it, and wrote her a letter, as full of friendship as her heart was of affection; to which, or to a second letter of the objurgatory kind, it is said, she made a spirited reply. He offered, ill as he was, to travel to her to Bath, with all possible expedition, to expostulate with her, and to obtain only an hour's conversation, with the hope of dissuading her from her inclinations. "Can Love be controuled by advice?" Hardly ever. Then, "Let Cupid and Hymen agree!" Johnson was asked about the letter in print, that is addressed to her and signed with his name; which occasions the present extravagance of this pen. He said, it exhibited his opinion, but had not two sentences together as he wrote them. He said, "it was an adumbration of his letter."

"But the greatest honour of his life was from a visit that he received from a great personage in the library of the queen's palace—only it was not from a king of his own making. Johnson, on his return, repeated the conversation, which was much to the honour of the great person, and was as well supported

C

25

as Lewis the XIVth could have continued with Voltaire. He said, he only wanted to be more known, to be more loved. They parted, much pleased with each other. If it is not an impertinent stroke of this pen, it were to be wished that one more person had conveyed an enquiry about him during his last illness. "Every body has left their names, or wanted to know how I do," says he; "but—" In his younger days he had a great many enemies, of whom he was not afraid.

"Ask you what provocation I have had?
"The strong antipathy of good to bad."

"Churchill, the puissant satirist, challenged Johnson to combat: satire the weapon. Johnson never took up the gauntlet or replied, for he thought it unbecoming him to defend himself against an author who might be resolved to have the last word. He was content to let his enemies feed upon him as long as they could. This writer has heard Churchill declare, "that he thought the poems of London, and The Vanity of Human Wishes, full of admirable verses, and that all his compositions were diamonds of the first water." But he wanted a subject for his pen and for raillery, and so introduced Pomposo into his descriptions. "For, with other wise folks, he sat up with the ghost." Our author, who had too implicit a confidence in human testimony, followed the newspaper invitation to Cock-lane, in order to detect the impostor, or, if it proved a being of an higher order, and appeared in a questionable shape, to talk with it. Posterity must be permitted to smile at the credulity of that period. Johnson had otherwise a vulnerable side; for he was one of

the few non-jurors that were left, and it was supposed he would never bow the knee to the Baal of whiggism. This reign, which disdained proscription, began with granting pensions (without requiring their pens) to learned men.

"Johnson was unconditionally offered one; but such a turn was given to it by the last mentioned satirical poet, that it might have made him angry or odious, or both. Says Churchill, amongst other passages very entertaining to a neutral reader—

"He damns the pension that he takes,
"And loves the Stuart he forfakes."

"Not-so fast, great satirist—for he had now no friends at Rome. In the sport of conversation, he would sometimes take the wrong side of a question, to try his hearers, or for his own exertions. But this may do mischief sometimes. "For, without aiming at ludicrous quotation, he could dispute on both sides, and confute." Among those he could trust himself with, he would enter into imaginary combat with the whigs, and has now and then shaken the principles of a sturdy revolutionist. All ingenious men can find arguments for and against every thing: and if their hearts are not good, they may do mischief with their heads. On all occasions he pressed his antagonist with so strong a front of argument, that he generally prevented his retreat. "Every body," said an eminent detector of impostors, "must be cautious how they enter the lists with Dr. Johnson." He wrote many political tracts since his pension. Perhaps he would not have written at all, unless impelled by gratitude. But he wrote his genuine thoughts, and imagined himself contend-

contending on the right side. A great parliamentary character seems to resolve all his American notions into the vain expectation of rocking a man in the cradle of a child. Johnson recounted the number of his opponents with indifference. He wrote for that government which had been generous to him. He was too proud to call upon lord Bute, or leave his name at his house, though he was told it would be agreeable to his lordship; for he said he had performed the greater difficulty, for he had taken the pension.

"The last popular work, to him an easy and a pleasing one, was the writing the *Lives of our Poets*, now reprinted in four octavo volumes. He finished this business so much to the satisfaction of the booksellers, that they presented him a gratuity of one hundred pounds, having paid him three hundred pounds as his price. The Knaptons made Tindal a large present on the success of his translation of Rapin's history. But an unwritten space must be found for what Johnson did respecting Shakspeare; for the writer and reader observe a disorder of time in this page. He took so many years to publish his edition, that his subscribers grew displeased and clamorous for their books, which he might have prevented; for he was able to do a great deal in a little time. Though for collation he was not fit. He could not pore long on a text. It was Columbus at the oar. It was on most literary points difficult to get himself into a willingness to work. He was idle, or unwell, or loth to act upon compulsion. But at last he tried to awake his faculties, and, like the lethargic porter of the castle of Indolence, "to rouse himself as much as rouse himself he can." He confessed that the publication of his

Shakspeare answered to him in every respect. He had a very large subscription.

"Dr. Campbell, then alive in Queen-square, who had a volume in his hand, pronounced, that the preface and notes were worth the whole subscription money. You would think the text not approved or adjusted by the past or present editions, and requiring to be settled by the future. It is hoped that the next editors will have read all the books that Shakspeare read: a promise our Johnson gave, but was not able to perform.

"The reader is apprized, that this memoir is only a sketch of life, manners, and writings—

"In every work regard the writer's end;
"For none can compass more than they
"intend."

"It looks forwards and backwards almost at the same time. Like the nightingale in Strada, "it hits imperfect accents here and there." Hawkesworth, one of the Johnsonian school, upon being asked, whether Johnson was an happy man, by a gentleman who had been just introduced to him, and wanted to know every thing about him, confessed, that he looked upon him as a most miserable being. The moment of enquiry was probably about the time he lost his wife, and sent for Hawkesworth, in the most earnest manner, to come and give him consolation and his company.—

"And screen me from the ills of life!" is the conclusion of his sombrous poem on November. In happier moments (for who is not subject to every skyey influence, and the evil of the hour?) he would argue, and prove it in a sort of dissertation, that there was, generally and individually, more of natural and moral good than of the contrary

trary. He asserted, that no man could pronounce he did not feel more pleasure than misery. Every body would not answer in the affirmative; for an ounce of pain outweighs a pound of pleasure. There are people who wish they had never been born—to whom life is a disease—and whose apprehensions of dying pains and of futurity embitter every thing. The reader must not think it impertinent to remark, that Johnson did not choose to pass his whole life in celibacy. Perhaps the raising up a posterity may be a debt and duty all men owe to those who have lived before them. Johnson had a daughter, who died before its mother, if this pen is not mistaken.

“The supposition of his having had a daughter was groundless. Mrs. Johnson never had a child after her marriage with the doctor, nor, from her advanced age, was such an event probable.

“When these were gone, he lost his hold on life, for he never married again. He has expressed a surprize that sir Isaac Newton continued totally unacquainted with the female sex, which is asserted by Voltaire, from the information of Chefelden, and is admitted to be true. For curiosity, the first and most durable of the passions, might have led him to have overcome that inexperience. This pen may as well finish this last point in the words of Fontenelle, that sir Isaac never was married, and perhaps never had time to think of it. Whether the sunshine of the world upon our author raised his drooping spirits, or that the lenient hand of time removed something from him, or that his health meliorated by mingling more with the croud of mankind, or not, he, however, appa-

rently acquired more chearfulness, and became more fit for the labours of life and his literary functions. But he certainly did not communicate to every intruder every uneasy sensation of mind and body. Who, it may be asked, can determine of the pleasure and the pain of others? True and solemn are the lines of Prior, in his Solomon—

“Who breathes must suffer, and who
“thinks must mourn;
“And he alone is blest, who ne’er was
“born.”

“Johnson thought he had no right to complain of his lot in life, or of having been disappointed: the world had not used him ill; it had not broken its word with him; it had promised him nothing; he aspired to no elevation; he had fallen from no height. Lord Gower endeavoured to obtain for him, by the interest of Swift, the mastership of a grammar-school of small income, for which Johnson was not qualified by the statutes to become a candidate. His lordship’s letter, published some years ago, is to the honour of the subject; in praise of his abilities and integrity, and in commiseration of his distressed situation. The younger Warton, by his influence, procured for him the honorary degree of Master of Arts at Oxford, on the conclusion of his Dictionary. Johnson wished, for a moment, to fill the chair of a professor, at Oxford, then become vacant, but he never applied for it. He was offered a good living by Mr. Langton, if he would accept it, and take orders; but he chose not to put off his lay habit. He would have made an admirable library-keeper; like Casaubon, Magliabechi, or Bent’ey. But he belonged to the world at large. He was nominated to be professor of

ancient

ancient literature, amongst the royal society of artists at Somerset-place, as was the late Dr. Franklin of history. A post of honour, but of nothing else. No suit nor service to be performed. Their names did not appear in the Red Book, or Court Calendar, amongst the other professors. Johnson had done that state some service, during their incorporation, and they knew it." Talking on the topick of what his inclinations or faculties might have led him to have been, had he been bred to the profession of the law, he has said he should have wished for the office of master of the rolls. He gave into this idea in table-talk, partly serious and partly jocose; for it was only a manner he had of describing himself to his friends without vanity of his parts (for he was above being vain) or envy of the honourable stations enjoyed by other men of merit. He would correct any compositions of his friends, (*habes confitentem*) and dictate on any subject on which they wanted information. He could have been an orator, if he would. On account of his occasional connexion with Dr. Dodd, for whom he made a bargain with the booksellers for his edition of the Bible, he wrote a petition to the crown for mercy, after his condemnation. To comply with the request in a letter which he received during divine service at Streatham church, he retired to Mr. Thrall's, "relinquishing, as he said, for the first time, the worship of his Creator to serve a fellow-creature." The letter he composed for the translator of Ariosto, that was sent to Mr. Hastings in Bengal, is esteemed a master-piece. Dr. Warton, of Winchester, talked of it as the very best he ever read. He could have been eminent, if he chose it, in letter-writing; a faculty in

which, according to Sprat, his Cowley excelled. His epistolary and confidential correspondence would make an agreeable publication, but the world will never be trusted with it. He wrote as well in verse as in prose. Though he composed so harmoniously in Latin and English, he had no ear for music; and tho' he lived in such habits of intimacy with sir Joshua Reynolds, and once intended to have written the lives of the painters, he had no eye, nor perhaps taste, for a picture, nor a landscape. He renewed his Greek some years ago, for which he found no occasion for twenty years. He owned that many knew more Greek than himself; but that his Grammar would shew he had once taken pains. Sir William Jones, one of the most enlightened of the sons of men, as Johnson described him, has often said he knew a great deal of Greek. He amused himself, very lately, with translating into Latin verse, many of the Greek epigrams; and had read over the Expedition of Xenophon, and the Iliad of Homer. He took care to keep up all his stock of learning of all sorts, and, in the words of queen Elizabeth, "to rummage up his old Greek." With French authors he was familiar. He had lately read over the works of Boileau. He passed a judgment on Sherlock's French and English letters, and told him there was more French in his English, than English in his French. His curiosity would have led him to read Italian, even if Baret had not been his acquaintance. Latin was as natural to him as English. He seemed to know the readiest roads to knowledge, and to languages their conductors. He possessed himself enough of the Saxon tongue, for the purpose of his work, and had always the assistance of Mr. Lye, when he wanted it.

it. He made such progress in the Hebrew, in a few lessons, that surprised his guide in that tongue. In company with Dr. Barnard and the fellows at Eton, he astonished them all with the display of his critical, classical, and profodical treasures, and also himself, for he protested, on his return, he did not know he was so rich.

“ Christopher Smart was at first well received by Johnson. This writer owed his acquaintance with our author, which lasted thirty years, to the introduction of that bard. Johnson, whose hearing was not always good, understood he called him by the name of Thyer, that eminent scholar, librarian of Manchester, and a non-juror. This mistake was rather beneficial than otherwise to the person introduced. Johnson had been much indisposed all that day, and repeated a Psalm he had just translated, during his affliction, into Latin verse, and did not commit to paper; for so retentive was the memory of this man, that he could always recover whatever he lent to that faculty. Smart in return recited some of his own Latin compositions. He had translated with success, and to Mr. Pope’s approbation, his St. Cecilian Ode. Come when you would, early or late, for he desired to be called from bed, when a visitor was at the door, the tea-table was sure to be spread, *te veniente die, te decedente*.—With tea he cheered himself in the morning, with tea he solaced himself in the evening; for in these, or in equivalent words, he expressed himself in a printed letter to Jonas Hanway, who had just told the public, that tea was the ruin of the nation, and of the nerves of every one who drank it. The pun upon his favourite liquor he heard with

a smile. Though his time seemed to be bespoke, and quite engrossed, it is certain his house was open to all his acquaintance, new and old. His amanuensis has given up his pen, the printer’s devil has waited on the stairs for a proof-sheet, and the press has often stood still. His visitors were delighted and instructed. No subject ever came amiss to him. He could transfer his thoughts from one thing to another with the most accommodating facility. He had the art, for which Locke was famous, of leading people to talk on their favourite subjects, and on what they knew best. By this he acquired a great deal of information. What he once heard he rarely forgot. They gave him their best conversation, and he generally made them pleased with themselves, for endeavouring to please him. Poet Smart used to relate, “that the first conversation with him was of such variety and length, that it began with poetry, and ended at fluxions.” He always talked as if he was talking upon oath. He was the wisest person, and had the most knowledge in ready cash, this writer had the honour to be acquainted with.—Here a little pause must be endured. The poor hand that holds the pen is benumbed by the frost as much as by a torpedo. It is cold within, even by the fire-side, and a white world abroad. His reader has a moment’s leisure to censure or commend the harvest of anecdote that is brought in, for his sake; and if he has more reading than usual, may remark for or against it in the manner of the Cardinal to Ariosto, “All this may be true, extraordinary, and entertaining; but where the deuce did you pick it all up?” The writer perhaps comes within the proverbial observation, that the in-

quisitive

quisitive person ends often in the character of the tell-tale.—Johnson's advice was consulted on all occasions. He was known to be a good casuist, and therefore had many cases for his judgment. It is notorious, that some men had the wickedness to over-reach him, and to injure him, till they were found out. Lauder was of the number, who made, at the time, all the friends of Milton his enemies. For this Johnson expiated, by composing a prologue to *Comus*, for the benefit of his great-granddaughter, and by praising Milton. There is nobody so likely to be imposed upon as a good man. "In the business of Lauder (says Johnson, in a letter) I was deceived, partly by thinking the man too frantic to be fraudulent." His conversation, in the judgment of several, was thought to be equal to his correct writings. Perhaps the tongue will throw out more animated expressions than the pen. He said the most common things in the newest manner. He always commanded attention and regard. If he wrote for money, he talked for reputation. His person, though unadorned with dress, and even deformed by neglect, made you expect something, and you was hardly ever disappointed. His manner was interesting; the tone of his voice, and the sincerity of his expressions, even when they did not captivate your affections, or carry conviction, prevented contempt. "No wonder he talks with more sense than any of us, said Goldsmith, for it is discharged from a larger caliber." If the line, by Pope, on his father, can be applied to Johnson, it is characteristic of him, who never swore, nor told a lie. If the first part is not

confined to the oath of allegiance, it will be useful to insert it.

"Nor dar'd an oath, nor hazarded a lie."

"It must be owned, his countenance, on some occasions, resembled too much the medallie likeness of Magliabechi, as exhibited before the printed account of him by Mr. Spence. No man dared to take liberties with him, nor flatly contradict him; for he could repel any attack, having always about him the weapons of ridicule, of wit, and of argument. No man was prophane or obscene in his company; and no one could leave his conversation without being wiser or better. It must be owned, that some who had the desire to be admitted to him, thought him too dogmatical, and as exacting too much homage to his opinions, and came no more. For they said, while he presided in his library, surrounded by his admirers, he would, "like Cato, give his little senate laws." He had great knowledge in the science of human nature, and of the fashions and customs of life, and knew the world well. He had often in his mouth this line of Pope,

"The proper study of mankind is man."

He was desirous of surveying life in all its modes and forms, and in all climates. Twenty years ago he offered to attend his friend Vansittart to India, who was invited there to make a fortune; but it did not take place. He talked much of travelling into Poland, to observe the life of the Palatines, the account of which struck his curiosity very much. His Rasselas, it is reported, he wrote to raise a purse of pecuniary assistance to his aged mother at Litchfield. The first title of

his manuscript was, "Prince of Ethiopia;" but, as he had erected a history of Seged, king of Ethiopia, in his *Ramblers*, he changed it to Abyssinia. He had formerly translated an account of those countries, written by a French Jesuit. Mr. Bruce is expected to give us a history of both these countries. The happy valley he would hardly be able to find in Abyssinia. Dr. Young used to say, "that *Rasselas* was a lump of wisdom." He there displays an uncommon capacity for remark, and makes the best use of the descriptions of travellers. It is an excellent romance. But his journey into the Western Islands is an original thing. He hoped, as he said, when he came back, that no Scotchman had any right to be angry with what he wrote. It is a book written without the assistance of books. He said, "it was his wish and endeavour not to make a single quotation." His curiosity must have been excessive, and his strength undecayed, to accomplish a journey of such length, and subject to such inconvenience. His book was eagerly read. One of the first men of the age (lord Camden) told Mr. Garrick, "that he would forgive Johnson all his wrong notions respecting America, on account of his writing that book." He thought himself the hardier for travelling. He took a tour into France, and meditated another into Italy or Portugal, for the sake of the climate. But Dr. Brocklesby, his friend and physician, (and who that knows him can wish for more companionable and professional knowledge?) conjured him, by every argument in his power, not to go abroad in the state of his health; but that if he was resolved on the first, and wished for something ad-

ditional to his income, he desired he would permit him to accommodate him out of his fortune with one hundred pounds a year, during his travels, to be paid by instalments.

"Ye little stars, hide your diminished heads."

The reply to this generosity was to this effect, "That he would not be obliged to any person's liberality, but to his king's." The continuance of this design to go abroad, occasioned the application for an increase of pension, that is so honourable to those who applied for it, and to the lord chancellor, who gave him leave to draw on his banker for any sum. It is just come to the knowledge of this narrator, that Mr. Gerard Hamilton offered Johnson his purse of one hundred guineas (*bonos erit huic quoque*); but it was not accepted, "for, said Johnson, I am worth fifteen hundred pounds!" A sum of money that would last longer than the whole half-guinea that Parson Adams boasted was sufficient for all his charges and expences. The reader, if he is in a good humour, may not dislike the comparative allusion. Adams, for the moment, was richer than Johnson. With the courage of a man, Johnson demanded to know of Brocklesby, if his recovery was impossible? Being answered in the affirmative; "then, says he, I will take no more opium, and give up my physicians." "At last he said, "If I am worse, I cannot go; if I am better, I need not go; but if I continue neither better nor worse, I am as well where I am." The writer of this Sketch could wish to have committed to memory or paper all the wise and sensible things that dropped from his lips. If the one could have

have been Xenophon, the other was a Socrates. His benevolence to mankind was known to all who knew him. Though so declared a friend to the church of England, and even a friend to the Convocation, it assuredly was not in his wish to persecute for speculative notions. He used to say, he had no quarrel with any order of men, unless they disbelieved in revelation and a future state. This writer has permission, from Dr. Dunbar, to publish this specimen of his pertinacious opinion: for which Mr. Hume would have put him into his chapter of bigots. "That prominent feature in Johnson's character was strongly marked in a conversation one morning with me *tête à tête*. He reproached me in a very serious, though amicable strain, for commending Mr. Hume as I had done in my Essays on the History of Mankind. I vindicated myself from the imputation as well as I was able—But he remained dissatisfied; still condemned my praise of Hume; and added: "For my part, sir, I should as soon have praised a *mad dog*."

Another morning when he expostulated with me on the same offence, I answered, that I had, indeed, commended Mr. Hume for talents which really belonged to him; but, by no means for his Scepticism, his Infidelity, or Irreligion. "I could not, sir," said Johnson, "on any account, have been the instrument of his praise. When I published my Dictionary, I might have quoted *Hobbes* as an authority in language, as well as many other writers of his time: but I scorned, sir, to quote him at all; because I did not like his principles." He would indeed have sided with Sacheverell against Daniel Burgess, if he thought the church was in danger. His

hand and his heart were always open to charity. The objects under his own roof were only a few of the subjects for relief. He was at the head of subscription in cases of distress. His guinea, as he said of another man of a bountiful disposition, was always ready. He wrote an exhortation to public bounty. He drew up a paper to recommend the French prisoners, in the last war but one, to the English benevolence; which was of service. He implored the hand of benevolence for others, even when he almost seemed a proper object of it himself.

"Like his hero *Savage*, while in company with him, he is supposed to have formerly strolled about the streets almost houseless, and as if he was obliged to go without the cheerful meal of the day, or to wander about for one, as is reported of *Homer*. If this were true, it is no wonder if he was unknown, or uninquired after, for a long time:

"Slow rises worth by poverty depressed."

When once distinguished, as he observes of *Ascham*, he gained admirers. He was fitted by nature for a critic. His *Lives of the Poets* (like all his biographical pieces) are well written. He gives us the pulp without the husks. He has told their personal history very well. But every thing is not new. Perhaps what Mr. Steevens helped him to, has increased the number of the best anecdotes. But his criticisms of their works are of the most worth, and the greatest novelty. His perspicacity was very extraordinary. He was able to take measure of every intellectual object; and to see all round it. If he chose to plume himself as an author, he might on account of the gift of intuition.

"The brightest feather in the Eagle's wing."

He has been censured for want of taste or good nature, in what he says of Prior, Gray, Lyttelton, Hammond, and others, and to have praised some pieces that nobody thought highly of. It was a fault in our critic too often to take occasion to shew himself superior to his subject, and also to trample upon it. There is no talking about taste. Perhaps Johnson, who spoke from his last feelings, forgot those of his youth. The love verses of Waller and others have no charms for old age. Even Prior's Henry and Emma, which pleased the old and surly Dennis, had no attractions for him. Of Gray, he always spoke as he wrote, and called his poetry artificial. If word and thought go together, the odes of Gray were not to the satisfaction of our critic. But what composition can stand before the porcupine pen of criticism? Mr. Potter, the elegant translator of *Æschylus*, has ably defended the ode and ode-writing of Gray against the opinion of Johnson: so has a Scotch professor, in an entertaining but sarcastical imitation of his language and criticism. Lyttelton, Akenfide, and Hammond, have also found friends in their defence against Johnson's accusation. He made some fresh observations on Milton, by placing him in a new point of view: and if he has shewn more of his excellencies than Addison does, he accompanies them with more defects. He took no critic from the shelf, neither Aristotle, Bossu, nor Boileau. He hardly liked to quote, much more to steal. He drew his judgments from the principles of human nature, of which the Rambler is full, before the Elements of Criticism

by Lord Kaimes made their appearance.

"It may be inserted here, that Johnson, soon after his coming to London, had thought of writing a History of the Revival of Learning. The booksellers had other service to offer him. But he never undertook it. The proprietors of the Universal History wished him to take any part in that voluminous work. But he declined their offer. His last employers wanted him to undertake the life of Spenser. But he said, Warton had left little or nothing for him to do. A system of morals next was proposed. But perhaps he chose to promise nothing more. He thought, as, like the running horse in Horace, he had done his best, he should give up the race and the chace. His character for learning lifted him into so much consequence, that it occasioned several respectable writers to dedicate their works to him. This was to receive more reverence than he paid. Murphy (to whom he was obliged, as he often said, for many social happinesses) addressed to him an imitation of a satire of Boileau: and Goldsmith dedicated a comedy to him, and praised him for what, as he explained it, Johnson would like to be praised—"his piety, and his wit." Franklin, (as a sincere admirer of his respectable character) inscribed his translation of Lucian's *Demonax* to him, and terms him the *Demonax* of the present age. His dependent Levett died suddenly under his roof. He preserved his name from oblivion, by writing an elegiac epitaph for him, which shews that his poetical fire was not extinguished, and is so appropriate, that it could belong to no other person in the world. Johnson said, that the remark of appropriation, was just

criti-

criticism; his friend was induced to pronounce, that he would not have so good an epitaph written for himself. Pope has nothing equal to it in his sepulchral poetry. When he dined with Mr. Wilkes, at a private table in the city, their mutual altercations were forgot, at least for that day. Johnson did not remember the North Briton, nor the sharpness of a paper against his description or definition of an alphabetical point animadverted upon in his Dictionary by that man of acuteness; who, in his turn, forgot the severity of a pamphlet of Johnson's. All was, during this meal, a reciprocation of wit and good humour. During the annual contest in the city, Johnson confessed, that Wilkes would make a very good chamberlain. When Johnson (who had said that he would as soon dine with Jack Ketch as with Jack Wilkes) could sit at the same table with this patriot, it may be concluded he did not write his animosities in marble.—Johnson was famous for saying what are called *good things*. Mr. Boswell, who listened to him for so many years, has probably remembered many. He mentioned many of them to Paoli, who paid him the last tribute of a visit to his grave. If Johnson had had as good eyes as Boswell, he might have seen more trees in Scotland, perhaps, than he mentions.

"This is not the record-office for his sayings: but a few must be recollected here. For Plutarch has not thought it beneath his dignity to relate some things of this sort, of some of his heroes. "Pray, Dr. Johnson (said somebody), is the master of the mansion at Streatham a man of much conversation, or is he only wise and silent?" "He strikes," says Johnson, "once an

hour, and I suppose strikes right." Mr. Thrale left him a legacy, and made him an executor. It came to Johnson's ears, that the great book-seller in the Strand, on receiving the last manuscript sheet of his Dictionary, had said, "Give Johnson his money, for I thank God I have done with him." The philologist took care that he should receive his compliments, and be informed, "he was extremely glad he returned thanks to God for any thing." Well known is the rude reproof he gave to a talker, who asserted, that every individual in Scotland had literature. (By the by, modern statesmen do not wish that every one in the king's dominions should be able to write and read.) "The general learning of the Scotch nation (said he, in a bad humour) resembles the condition of a ship's crew, condemned to short allowance of provisions: every one has a mouthful, and nobody a belly-full." Mr. Garrick used to relate an incident, with great humour, but without personal mimicry (of which perhaps he was the inventor, and the inheritance went to Foote), says the communicator, who desired it might have a place here that made a good story, as he told it. Johnson was once beset with questions, by somebody, about the merits of the tragedy of Douglas, that had just made its public appearance. After submitting to hear some favourite descriptive passage, which the reciter praised to the skies, ignorantly or hypocritically, he was asked, if there ever had been written lines so transcendently excellent by any other poet? To get rid of the importunity, Johnson impetuously replied; "Yes, by many a man—by many a woman—and by many a child."—This answer immediately checked the enthusiasm of the

the querist. On reporting this decision at a table, it was asserted in company, that Johnson took an opportunity of saying this again, to a very eminent scholar at Edinburgh; whom he made an enemy by it.

"This opinion of our critic was not meant as a severity against Douglas; for he had said, "he thought it as good a first play as he had read." Gray commended it excessively. It accordingly holds its rank at the theatre. Its merits, and the great performance of the character of lady Randolph by Mrs. Siddons, who is above praise, bring it into frequent representation, and occasion clapping hands and weeping eyes. Johnson received, in the course of the last year, a long and agreeable visit from this actress. On his being asked afterwards, if he could not wish to compose a part in a new tragedy (Euripides and Voltaire wrote plays when they were older than Johnson) to display her powers? He replied, "Mrs. Siddons excels in the pathetic, for which I have no talent." Then, says his friend, imperial tragedy must belong to you (alluding to his Irene.) Johnson smiled. Of this enough. His size has been described to be large: his mind and person both in a large scale. His face and features are happily preserved by Reynolds and by Nollkens. His face and shoulders were moulded and taken off since his death, (alas! how changed from him!) by Hoskins, of St. Martin's-lane, from which a bust is made. His elocution was energetic, and, in the words of a great scholar in the North, who did not like him, he spoke in the Lincolnshire dialect. His articulation became worse, by some dental losses. But he never was silent on that account, nor unwilling to talk. It may be said

of him, that he was never overtaken with liquor, a declaration bishop Hoadly makes of himself. He owned that he drank his bottle at a certain time of life. Lions, and the fiercest of the wild creation, said he, drink nothing but water. Like Solomon, who tried so many things for curiosity and delight, he renounced strong liquors, (strong liquors, according to Fenton, of all kinds, were the aversion of Milton); and he might have said, as that king is made to do by Prior,

"I drank, I lik'd it not, 'twas rage,

" 'twas noise,

"An airy scene of transitory joys."

His temper was not naturally smooth, but seldom boiled over. It was worth while to find out the *mollia tempora fandi*. The words *nugarum contemptor* fell often from him in a reverie. When asked about them, he said, he appropriated them from a preface of Dr. Hody. He was desirous of seeing every thing that was extraordinary in art or nature; and to resemble his Imlac in his moral romance of Rasselas. It was the fault of fortune that he did not animadvert on every thing at home or abroad. He had been upon the salt-water, and observed something of a sea-life: of the uniformity of the scene, and of the sickness and turbulence belonging to that element, he had felt enough. He had seen a little of the military life and discipline, by having passed whole days and nights in the camp, and in the tents, at Warley Common. He was able to make himself entertaining in his description of what he had seen. A spark was enough to illuminate him. The giant and the Corsican fairy were objects of attention to him. The riding-horses in Astley's amphitheatre (no new public amusement, for Homer al-

ludes

tudes to it) he went to see; and on the fireworks of Torri he wrote a Latin poem.

"The study of humanity, as was injuriously said of the great Bentley, had not made him inhuman. He never wantonly brandished his formidable weapon. He intended to keep his enemies off. He did not mean, as in the advice of Radcliffe to Mead, "to bully the world, lest the world should bully him." He seemed to be endowed with great clemency to all subordinate beings. He said, "he would not sit at table, where a lobster that had been roasted alive was one of the dishes. His charities were many; only not so extensive as his pity, for that was universal. He frequently remarked, that every year took something from him of life, and robbed him of a companion or an acquaintance. He had said in his Preface to his Dictionary, that he had outlived all he wished to please. However fond he was of existence, and afraid of death, he would have thought the lot contained in the wish and punishment of the ancients, *ultimus suorum moriatur*! intolerable. An evening convivial club, for three nights in every week, was contrived to amuse him, in Essex-street, founded, according to his own words, "in frequency and parsimony;" to which he gave a set of rules, as Ben Jonson did his *leges convivales* at the Devil tavern—Johnson asked one of his executors, a few days before his death (which, according to his will, he expected every day) "where do you intend to bury me?" He answered, "In Westminster Abbey." Then," continued he, "place a stone over my grave (probably to notify the spot) that my remains may not be disturbed." This direction is executed. His expectations of death

were so immediate, that he had not time to bequeath his house at Litchfield, to maintain an exhibition at Pembroke-College, as he had resolved. For he was desirous of paying that tributary respect, and of taking that method of making himself remembered by that society. He gave a copy of his works very lately to Dr. Adams, the present master, who had been his tutor. Tutor and pupil had a meeting in the way to London from Derbyshire, which furnished a conversation, the former thinks, (though old in years and in wisdom), he shall be the better for as long as he lives, and which, if Johnson had lived longer, the world also might have been the better for. He intended to compose and publish a volume of Devotions, says Dr. Adams. Who will come forth with an inscription for him in the Poet's-Corner? Who should have thought that Garrick and Johnson would have their last sleep together? It were to be wished he could have written his own epitaph with propriety. None of the lapidary inscriptions by Dr. Freind have more merit than what Johnson wrote on Thrale, on Goldsmith, and Mrs. Salisbury. By the way, one of these was criticised, by some men of learning and taste, from the table of sir Joshua Reynolds, and conveyed to him in a round robin. Maty, in his Review, praises his Latin epitaphs very highly. This son of study and of indigence died worth above seventeen hundred pounds; Milton died worth fifteen hundred. His legacy to his black servant Frank is noble and exemplary. Milton left in his hand-writing the titles of some future subjects for his pen; so did Johnson. The booksellers gave it out, as a piece of literary news, that he had an inclination to translate the

the lives of Plutarch from the Greek. It appears from his literary memorandum-book, that this was one of the tasks he assigned to himself. He had cut out so much for himself, that many more years of life would not have concluded these Herculean labours. The winter before he died, he talked seriously of a translation of Thuanus, one volume of which is already translated in folio, by Dr. Wilfon of New-ark.

"Johnson died by a quiet and silent expiration, to use his own words on Milton: and his funeral was respectably and numerously attended. The friends of the doctor were happy on his easy departure, for they apprehended he might have died hard. It must be told, that a dissatisfaction was expressed in the public papers, that he was not buried with all possible funeral rites and honours. In all processions and solemnities something will be forgotten or omitted. Here no disrespect was intended. The executors did not think themselves justified in doing more than they did. For only a little cathedral service, accompanied with lights and music, would have raised the price of interment. In this matter, fees run high: they could not be excused; and the expences were to be paid from the property of the deceased. His funeral expences amounted to more than two hundred pounds. Future monumental charges may be defrayed by the generosity of subscription: the whole cost will be more than the last mentioned sum. At the end of this Sketch, it may be hinted (sooner might have been prepossession) that Johnson told this writer, for he saw he always had his eye and his ear upon him, that at some time or other he might be called upon to assist a posthumous account of him.

"A hint was given to our author, many years ago, by this rhapsodist, to write his own life, lest somebody should write it for him. He has reason to believe, he has left a manuscript biography behind him. His executors, all honourable men, will fit in judgment upon his papers. Thuanus, Buchanan, Huetius, Bayle, and others, have been their own historians, or journalists.

"It was forgot to be told, that twenty years ago he gave an abstract in the Gentleman's Magazine, of Mr. Tytler's book, in vindication of Mary queen of Scots, at the instigation of an old acquaintance. Probably he thought her innocent of the charge of writing the letters to Bothwell.

"But he confessed, that her letting Bothwell run away with her, and the marrying him afterwards, was very profligate and indefensible. This writer cannot avoid giving the classical reader, Dryden's Virgil lying upon his table, a parallel adventure (for, says Voltaire, there are examples of every thing in this world) of Dido the queen of Carthage, who was ruined by love (as much as the desiring and the desirable Mary of Scotland), and followed her paramour Æneas into the cave, where and when, says poetical history,

"She call'd it marriage, by that specious name

"To veil the crime, and sanctify the shame."

"That the ceremonies were short, we may believe," says Dryden, "for Dido was not only amorous, but a widow."

"He wrote the plan for the Literary Magazine, and furnished it with some excellent essays and criticisms. He composed the Preface to the Poems of Miss Williams, the Pre-

Preface to Sully's Memoirs, to Macbean's Classical Geography, and to Adams on the Globes. Mr. Davies collected most of his Fugitive Pieces into three handsome volumes.

"He had a large, but not a splendid library, near 5000 volumes. Many authors, not in hostility with him, presented him with their works. But his study did not contain half his books. He possessed the chair that belonged to the Ciceronian Dr. King of Oxford, which was given him by his friend Vansittart. It answers the purposes of reading and writing, by night or by day; and is as valuable in all respects as the chair of Aristotle, as delineated in the Preface to

Hoole's liberal translation of that poet. Since the rounding of this period, intelligence is brought, that this literary chair is purchased by Mr. Hoole. Relicks are venerable things, and are only not to be worshipped. On the reading-chair of Mr. Speaker Onslow a part of this historical sketch was written.

"The memory of some people, says Mably very lately, "is their understanding." This may be thought, by some readers, to be the case in point. Whatever anecdotes were furnished by memory, this pen did not choose to part with to any compiler. His little bit of gold he has worked into as much gold-leaf as he could.

The following ADDITIONS came too late to be inserted in their proper Places.

“ IN 1750, we find Johnson at Oxford, (which he visited almost every year) during the instalment of lord Westmoreland, the chancellor of the university: on which occasion he wore his academical gown in the theatre, “ where, says he, I have clapped my hands, till they are sore, at Dr. King’s speech.” From hence he transmitted a periodical Idler, during the Idler season, and whilst his visits were at this place. Like Erasmus, he carried his powers of composition with him wherever he went. University college was frequently his home; and he often expressed his wishes for an appointment in Pembroke college, which were rather discouraged, for whatever reasons. That college might have had, till they were weary of each other, this most respectable layman to itself, where, like father Paul, in his monastic cell, he might have enjoyed his meditations, and been consulted, like that Venetian oracle, on all points and cases whatsoever.

“ In 1765, Johnson was at Cambridge, with Mr. Beauclerk, “ where he drank his large potations of tea, (says Dr. Sharp, in a letter, and who styles him Caliban) interrupted by many an indignant contradiction, and many a noble sentiment.”

He displayed some instances of his tenacious memory, talked learnedly on sonnet-writing, which subject arose from the sonnet compositions of Milton. “ At twelve, says the letter, he began to be very great, stripped poor Mrs. Macauley to the very skin, then gave her for his toast, and drank her in two bumpers.”

“ Though his predilection for the English establishments for learning was always conspicuous, yet he could find praise for the literary seminaries of the North. For when he was on his tour, with Mr. Boswell, his *fidus Achates*, the scene at Aberdeen had made such an impression upon him, that he often said, on his return to London, to Dr. Dunbar, that if he ever removed from the capital, he would incline to fix at Aberdeen, “ What, said the professor, in preference to Oxford?” “ Yes, sir, replied Johnson, for Aberdeen is not only a seat of learning, but a seat of commerce, which would be particularly agreeable. This he so often repeated, that Dunbar used to tell him, he had secured apartments for him in the King’s college, which flattered him much. If he had taken a residence at this university, we possibly might have heard of the walk of Johnson at Aberdeen, as of Erasmus at Cambridge.

bridge. *Localities* have charms for every body.

" [Since the revise of this sheet, a publication of some of his devotional pieces is announced to the public.]

" He composed forty sermons. " I have no right to enquire what is become of them, said Johnson, for I have been paid for them." The late memoir writer of Dr.

Sykes relates, that his manuscript sermons are credibly reported to be sold. Good sermons, warranted originals, will always fetch a price. Little did this biographer suspect that Johnson could have found leisure or inclination for such employments. But who can tell what a friend is about, when he neither sees nor hears him?

T H E E N D.

E R R A T U M.

Page 9, line 36, first column, for *wonders*, read *words*.

